Expert Consultations | Fifty Shades

Dr Sue Bagshaw MB BS FRACShM FRNZCGP CNZM, Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Otago

[edited transcript from phone conversation]

Sixteen year old girls are generally more emotionally well-developed than boys, and would therefore be more easily able to digest and contextualise the complex relationship dynamics present in Fifty Shades.

It's easier to understand these concepts via reading, as films sometimes move too fast.

Girls love the concept of negotiating power, so these films may be of interest to them, and the nuanced dynamics depicted would be of positive impact.

If young people are not ready for something emotionally, they tend to ignore it anyway.

Reading the excerpts, Sue felt that the messages around consent contained in this film, are 'really good' for young people, though she would also always recommend some sort of label that contains an encouragement to talk through anything they don't understand, with an adult so they can contextualise the content.

Tara Black, Media Studies Teacher WEGC

"I haven't seen the films. The description of the first one reads like something that should be R18. It seems to promote an unhealthy relationships in a disturbing way. The second film doesn't sound as bad to me.

That said, all Year 13 students (I would say they are 17 - maybe saw it when they were 16 - In my Year 13 English class) that I have spoken to say 1. It is a bad movie (not relevant to the rating, obviously) and that 2. They could see that the relationship was damaging and not good. I had several girls tell me that they weren't sure that all 16 year olds would be able to see that there were negative relationships in there. "It depends on the person", they said. (Again, this is typical, isn't it? Students always think they can handle things others can't).

The new film is something that they are going to see as a joke. They see it as slightly-risque but not to be taken seriously.

So, in terms of injury to the public good, I don't think that the 16 year olds I know are overall in particular danger of being confused or misled - I work at a girls' school. The one 14/15 year old girl I spoke to who had seen it (Year 11 Media) said to me 'it was yuck' and 'horrible' so she stopped watching it (a cousin had roped her into watching it). It was definitely too much for her."